

Highlights on Mackinder's Heartland as a Grand Theory, An Updated Version

Theory is often defined as a statement of a relationship between variables. Mackinder's Heartland Theory cannot be considered a middle-range or a middle level theory or even a macro-level theory, but it is a grand theory par excellence. All the above theories are much relevant to the levels of analysis as part of sociology. The theory is embedded in the context of geopolitical and international relations because it provides a framework for understanding the relationship between geography, power, and international politics at a holistic level.

Mackinder's theory is also considered a grand theory rather than a middle-range one. Mackinder's theory as its focus is the "heartland" and its control over global power; it is then such a broad and expansive framework for understanding international relations and geopolitics. Middle-range theories, on the other hand, are more specific and focused on explaining particular social phenomena within a given context.

Mackinder's theory is considered a grand theory because in terms of broad scope it aims to explain the global distribution of power and influence, encompassing entire regions and even the world. Meanwhile, in terms of general principles, it proposes general principles about the relationship between geography, power, and international relations, without focusing on specific social contexts. Further it has a less empirical focus because at a time when Mackinder's theory draws on geographical observations, it is less focused on empirical data and statistical analysis, according to a Wikipedia article about middle-range theory.

Conversely, middle-range theories, like those developed by Robert K. Merton, focus on specific aspects of social interaction, such as deviance, social stratification, or communication. They propose testable hypotheses and rely on empirical data to support their claims.

Thus Mackinder's Heartland Theory is considered a grand theory as it focuses on large-scale geographic areas and their influence on global power dynamics.

Macro-level theory and grand theory are both broad theoretical frameworks, but they differ in scope and purpose. Grand theories aim to explain the fundamental aspects of society and social life at a very abstract level, while macro-level theories focus on large-scale social processes and structures.

Here's a more detailed breakdown: a grand theory addresses fundamental questions about society's structure, change, and order offers broad perspectives that explain many aspects of social life may be abstract and difficult to test empirically.

Examples: structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

As for a macro-level theory: it examines large-scale social phenomena and structures.

Focuses on social systems, institutions, and their relationships can be used to understand trends, patterns, and outcomes at the societal level.

Examples: theories explaining the relationship between socioeconomic status and access to information, and theories about national or supranational political regimes.

In essence grand theories are the broadest, most abstract frameworks for understanding society.

Macro-level theories examine specific large-scale social processes and structures.

While grand theories can provide a general framework for understanding social life, macro-level theories can be used to analyze particular aspects of society, such as inequality, social change, or institutional relationships.

Mackinder's theory, also known as the "geographical pivot" theory, posits that control of the "Heartland", namely the Eurasian interior, grants control over the "World-Island", namely Africa and Eurasia, which in turn leads to global dominance.

The theory analyzes the relationship between geographical features and political power on a grand scale, examining how control over specific regions can impact global influence.

This perspective contrasts with micro-level theories, which focus on smaller units of analysis, such as individual actions or interactions within a specific context.

Mackinder's theory is considered a grand theory because it also deals with broad, overarching patterns and relationships in international politics rather than focusing on individual behaviors or events.

In Arabic, "middle-range theory" can be translated as نظرية النطاق المتوسط (nazariyah al-natāq al-mutawassit). This translation directly translates the concept of a theory that focuses on a specific area or phenomenon within a broader discipline, rather than being a highly general, grand theory.

Middle-range theory was developed by integrating theory and construction by pioneering Sociologist Robert K. Merton is an approach to sociological theorizing aimed at empirical research. It is currently the de facto dominant approach to sociological theory especially in the United States. Middle-range theory starts with an empirical phenomenon as opposed to a broad abstract entity like the social system, and so it abstracts from it to create general statements that can be verified by data.

This approach stands in contrast to the earlier "grand" theorizing of social theory, such as functionalism and many conflict theories. Raymond Boudon has argued that "middle-range" theory is the same concept that most other sciences simply call "theory". The analytical sociology movement has as its aim the unification of such theories into a coherent paradigm at a greater level of abstraction.

Sociological theory, if it is to advance significantly, must proceed on these interconnected planes: by developing special theories from which to derive hypotheses that can be empirically investigated and by evolving a progressively more general conceptual scheme that is adequate to consolidate groups of special theories.

— Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*: The term "middle-range theory" does not refer to a specific theory, but is rather an approach to theory construction. Raymond Boudon defines middle-range theory as a commitment to two ideas.

The first is positive, and describes what such theories should do: sociological theories, like all scientific theories, should aim to consolidate otherwise segregated hypotheses and empirical regularities; "if a 'theory' is valid, it 'explains' and in other words 'consolidates' and federates empirical regularities which on their side would appear otherwise segregated." The other is negative, and it relates to what theory cannot do: "it is hopeless and quixotic to try to determine the overarching independent variable that would operate in all social processes, or to determine the essential feature of social structure, or to find out the two, three, or four couples of concepts ... that would be sufficient to analyze all social phenomena".

The midrange approach was developed by Robert Merton as a departure from the general social theorizing of Talcott Parsons. Merton agreed with Parsons that a narrow empiricism consisting entirely of simple statistical or observational regularities cannot arrive at successful theory.

However, he found that Parsons' "formulations were remote from providing a problematics and a direction for theory-oriented empirical inquiry into the observable worlds of culture and society". He was thus directly opposed to the abstract theorizing of scholars who are engaged in the attempt to construct a total theoretical system covering all aspects of social life.

With the introduction of the middle-range theory programme, he advocated that sociologists should concentrate on measurable aspects of social reality that can be studied as separate social phenomena, rather than attempting to explain the entire social world. He saw both the middle-range theory approach and middle range theories themselves as temporary: when they matured, as natural sciences already had, the body of middle-range theories would become a system of universal laws; but, until that time, social sciences should avoid trying to create a universal theory. Merton's original foil in the construction was Talcott Parsons, whose action theory C. Wright Mills later classified as a "grand theory," though Parsons had vehemently rejected this categorization. Middle-range theories are normally constructed by applying theory-building techniques to empirical research, which produce generic propositions about the social world, which in turn can also be empirically tested.

Examples of middle-range theories are theories of reference groups, social mobility, normalization processes, formation of social norms. Role conflict and the middle-range approach has played a role in turning sociology into an increasingly empirically oriented discipline. This was also important in post-war thought.

In the post-war period, middle-range theory became the dominant approach to theory construction in all variable-based social sciences. Middle-range theory Lewis

As for micro-level analyses:

Micro-level analysis is the study of small-scale social interactions and individual behaviors within a social context. It focuses on the immediate interactions between people and the meaning they create within those interactions. In essence, it examines "what people do, say, and think in the actual flow of momentary experience," [according to pressbooks.pub](https://www.pressbooks.pub).

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

Key Aspects of Micro-Level Analysis: in terms of focus on Interactions, it examines how people interact with each other, including face-to-face communication, small group dynamics, and individual behaviors. In terms of contextual Understanding, it emphasizes the importance of the specific context in which interactions occur, recognizing that social situations shape behavior. In terms of meaning making, it explores how individuals create meaning and understand social interactions, including the use of symbols and language.

In terms of individual agency, it considers the agency of individuals within their social environment, recognizing their ability to make choices and exert influence. In terms of bottom-up perspective, it views social phenomena as arising from the individual level, rather than from larger social structures. **Examples of Micro-Level Analysis:** studying conversations between friends: Analyzing how they use language, gestures, and other symbols to communicate. Observing interactions in a classroom: examining how students interact with each other and with the teacher.

Investigating family dynamics: understanding how individuals within a family interact and influence each other's behaviors.

Analyzing micro-aggressions: examining how small, everyday acts of prejudice can have a cumulative impact on individuals. Studying the "self" and social context understanding how individuals' perceptions of themselves are shaped by their social environment.

Thus a Micro-level analysis places a strong emphasis on context, meaning making, and interactions. It involves analyzing "what people do, say, and think in the actual flow of momentary experience (Collins 1981:984). As an example, a micro-level study might look at the accepted rules of conversation in various groups such as among teenagers or business professionals.

Sociologists who use macro-level analysis look at trends among and between institutions and societies and it emphasizes the influence of structures, institutions, and systems. The aspects of the society that are larger scale and exist over extended periods of time (Collins 1981). In contrast, a macro-level analysis might research how one institution impacts another, for example how religion influences politics.

References: For a definition of a theory I consulted a book titled "The Craft of Political Research," by W. Phillips Shively, ninth edition, 2013.

I consulted Wikipedia: on Robert C. Merton.

I consulted Al Overview for levels of analysis I consulted a book titled "Sociology in Everyday Life," Open Oregon Educational Resources, 2024.